

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.gov

Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.iowa.gov

Feb. 19, 2008

1. Iowa Pheasants Endure Long Hard Winter – by Lowell Washburn [electronic photos available]
2. Migrating Birds Reluctant to Return to Frigid Iowa
3. Health of Missouri River Focus of Four Day Conference
4. Iowa Outdoors Magazine Showcases Spring in Iowa
5. DNR Spring Sale Set for May 10

[Electronic photos available]

IOWA PHEASANTS ENDURE LONG HARD WINTER

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

For Iowa pheasants, it's becoming a long hard winter. In parts of the north and east, wildlife populations have already endured a full two and a half months of snow cover. As we move into late February, most of the state remains sealed in snow and ice.

As snow conditions persist, pheasants have become extremely visible as foraging flocks scratch and peck their way across frozen landscapes. As the winter weather wears on, it's only natural for wildlife enthusiasts to voice their concern over the welfare of local pheasant flocks.

One thing is certain. Winter is a tough time for all wildlife. Just as spring is a time of renewal; winter is the time of loss. But not all winters are created equal. Generally speaking, open winters mean high [pheasant] survival. Deep snow for lots of days results in substantially increased mortality. Blizzards and ice storms are a pheasant's worst winter nightmare.

So how is this winter stacking up for Iowa's most popular gamebird? According to DNR Pheasant Biologist, Todd Bogenschutz, no one can say for sure until it's over. At this point in time, however, the winter appears to be something of a mixed bag.

"Pheasant losses average around three percent for each week the ground is white," says Bogenschutz. "During an average Iowa winter we'll lose 20 to 40 percent of our

breeding hens. All things considered, I'd say that we'll probably see above normal pheasant mortality across much of the state. The way this winter's storm systems have tracked, parts of southern and eastern Iowa received more snowfall than the rest of the state which could result in higher mortality in those regions. In northeast Iowa, for example, the average snowfall for Dec. 1 through March 31 is 29 inches. This winter, the northeast received 33 inches of snowfall during December and January. In north central Iowa, the winter average is 29 inches of snow. This winter, the region received 19.7 inches during December and January.

"We currently have statewide snow cover and birds are concentrating around the best winter habitats. We've had some wind, but fortunately we haven't had any of the old fashioned blizzards that can take out 50 percent of the pheasant population in a couple of days," says Bogenschutz. "This year, winter storms have been more moderate. As one habitat drifts full, birds have been able to successfully move to the next best thing.

"When it comes to winter pheasant survival, food is not an issue," says Bogenschutz. "When it comes to finding forage, pheasants are extremely resourceful. In Iowa, starvation is not a problem."

What is critical, says Bogenschutz, is for birds to find secure winter habitats to protect from things like predators and exposure. Although people often worry about the effects of prolonged sub-zero temperatures, cold in itself is pretty much a non-issue. As long as birds can locate secure roosting cover such as cattails or native grasses, they can easily withstand the coldest temperatures the Midwest has to offer.

###

MIGRATING BIRDS RELUCTANT TO RETURN TO FRIGID IOWA

The sweet voice of a male cardinal danced through the calm air searching for a willing female to answer to his spring breeding song. With a temperature of minus-2 degrees and forecasts for it to get colder, spring may seem like a far off dream.

But spring is coming and the evidence lies with the bald eagles and red-tailed hawks that are starting to build nests, and lapland longspurs, that normally over winter in southern Iowa and northern Missouri but were pushed further south, are starting to return.

"We are not seeing as many birds back as we would normally given the depth and extent of the heavy winter, but we are seeing a few robins and bluebirds," said Doug Harr, coordinator of the DNR's wildlife diversity program. "We are starting to see more flocks now, indicating the birds are on the move."

Bird migration is triggered by day length, not by temperature. Day length is also responsible for releasing the hormones that tells the birds it's time to look for a mate.

“Bluebirds and robins go only as far south as they need to and they tend to be some of the earliest to return, to push the limits because they can feed on berries and seeds. But even that supply has been limited this year,” Harr said.

That’s not the case for birds that feed on insects. There are not many mosquitoes or flies available in February, especially this year, and the way it’s going, it may be June before the insect-eaters return.

For more information, contact Harr at 515-281-4815.

###

HEALTH OF MISSOURI RIVER FOCUS OF FOUR DAY CONFERENCE

NEBRASKA CITY, Neb. – Scientists and resource managers will gather at Nebraska City next week to discuss ways to integrate scientific findings into a better understanding of the Missouri River into management decisions.

The Missouri River has one of the most altered river ecosystems in the country. Past management decisions have focused on flood risk versus functioning flood plain, and water supply demands versus a more naturalized hydrograph, and so on. Attendees will discuss how to reach a balance to make the river system healthy and functional.

The Missouri River Natural Resource Conference and BiOp Forum will draw nearly 300 professionals from eight states who will be work toward focusing on understanding the ecosystem goods and services and how to measure and incorporate them into management decisions.

“This improved understanding will help define future scientific needs to assess those ecosystem benefits as we transition to a healthier Missouri River ecosystem through recover and restoration efforts,” said Chris Larson, chair of the conference planning committee and supervisor for the fisheries staff in southwest Iowa.

“It’s our hope that everyone leaves the conference seeing the need to better link Missouri River management, ecology, social values and ecosystem services through future science based efforts,” Larson said.

The conference in Lied Lodge Conference Center, in Nebraska City, Neb., runs from Feb. 25 to 28.

For more information, contact Chris Larson, Iowa DNR fisheries, or Angi Bruce, Iowa DNR wildlife, at 712-769-2587.

###

IOWA OUTDOORS MAGAZINE SHOWCASES SPRING IN IOWA

From traipsing through spring wildflower forests to an outdoor adventure in the wilds of Van Buren County, *Iowa Outdoors* magazine's March/April issue takes readers on a trip through Iowa. In the issue you can...

Take a fishing trip:

The 2008 Spring Fishing Forecast shows how and where to hook the best catch. From bullheads to trout, 14 varieties of native Iowa fish are showcased in this eight page spread. The statewide guide even has a detailed map of all the best fishing spots.

Join the hunt for Iowa's most elusive seasonal delights:

In an exclusive article, contributing writer Jennifer Wilson explores the beauty of unique Iowa landscape while on the hunt for Iowa's most elusive spring treats; morel mushrooms and wild turkeys.

Discover Iowa's local heroes:

Writer Joe Wilkinson highlights swiftwater rescue training to save lives.

Learn about today's water quality efforts:

DNR fisheries biologists are closely monitoring Iowa's Cold Springs Lake to gauge how a native vegetation transplant program will impact fishing. This new program could help bring back aquatic life in Cass County.

The issue also includes:

- Expert tips on fishing, hunting, hiking, bird watching and more
- Gorgeous nature photography including photos Iowa's native wildflowers.
- Great articles on Iowa's natural gems and travel destinations
- In-depth stories on ways Iowans are protecting and enjoying natural resources
- Outdoor activities, seasonal recipes and fun activities for the whole family

Iowa Outdoors is an award-winning- four-color magazine produced bi-monthly by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources promoting and encouraging outdoor recreation, travel and environmental stewardship. Subscriptions can be purchased by going to: www.iowaoutdoorsmagazine.com or by calling 1-800-361-8072. Annual subscriptions are available for just \$12 per year.

DNR CONTACTS: Brian Button (515) 281-0716, or Alan Foster (515) 281-8874

###

DNR SPRING SALE SET FOR MAY 10

DES MOINES – The Iowa DNR will hold a spring auction Saturday, May 10, 2008 at the Cattle Barn on the Iowa State Fairgrounds. The gates will open at 8 a.m. and the auction will begin around 9 a.m. A public viewing of the items will be announced at a later date. The DNR is compiling a list of items and will have a sale bill available after April 15.

Items up for auction include firearms, boats, outboard motors, chainsaws, mowers, trailers, farm and office equipment and more. The items are sold “as is” with no guarantee or warranty.

Any person interested in purchasing a firearm at the auction must have either a valid Iowa permit to acquire pistols or revolvers, a federal firearms license, or a professional or non-professional permit to carry concealed weapons. The Iowa permit to acquire can be obtained from a sheriff’s office. Allow two to three weeks to receive the permit.

Payment must be made on auction day. All sales are final. Firearms must be removed from the site within one half hour after the sale of the firearm is completed. All other items must be removed from the sale site after full payment is made.

Sales taxes will be collected. Boats, snowmobiles, trailers and vehicles will pay taxes to the proper county office when registering those items.

The Iowa DNR reserves the right to reject any bids and withdraw any item from the sale at any time. To receive a copy of the sale bill, send an email to susan.davenport@dnr.iowa.gov or a self addressed stamped envelop to 2008 Surplus Sale, Iowa DNR, 502 E. 9th St., Des Moines, IA 50319.

###